**Ethical Practice**

**Ethical Practice: NOT Top 10**

1. **You don’t know your values.**

Do you consider yourself a person of high moral standing? Do you have integrity? Are you honest? Are you fair and consistent in your treatment of others? If you cannot identify these traits in yourself now, it will be very difficult to use them in moments when it matters. We have a responsibility to our patients and others within the profession to maintain a consistent, moral pattern of behavior.

1. **You don’t know the laws in your state governing athletic trainers and other health professionals.**

If your state requires licensure, it is your responsibility to obtain and maintain your license to practice athletic training. The same follows for states that require registration and certification. Understand that state laws vary and govern what you are allowed to perform. You may have learned oxygen administration in your CAATE-approved program, but if the state does not permit you to use this skill, it is unlawful to do so.

1. **HIPAA and FERPA violations.**

An athlete or parent will ask you how a teammate is feeling; how quickly they will return to play. It is your responsibility to always answer with HIPAA and FERPA regulations in mind. It is unlawful to share such information, even if the one asking the question knows it is sensitive material.

1. **You haven’t read and understood the NATA Code of Ethics.**

You covered the Code of Ethics in your CAATE-approved program, and you initial that you read and understood them with every BOC renewal, but do you really know what the principles require? Take a moment to read the [Code of Ethics](http://www.nata.org/codeofethics) and break down the principles.

1. **You fail to report ethics violations.**

An important principle people forget in the NATA Code of Ethics is that it is also our responsibility to report unethical and unlawful behavior. Failing to report such actions makes you just as responsible for the violation as the person committing it. Crimes can be reported anonymously to the [NATA Committee on Professional Ethics](http://www.nata.org/EC).

1. **Friendly relationships with players and patients.**

Most athletic trainers have a caring disposition, but some of us have problems balancing being a professional versus being a friend. Strive to maintain professional relationships with your patients to avoid conflicts of interest. Find your “zone of helpfulness” – the zone between being under-involved and over-involved.

1. **Fraternization.**

Aside from friendly relationships, taking those relationships to a romantic or sexual level is an unethical act. This can be a major conflict of interest for both parties involved. A professional relationship always exists and should be given priority. Also know your institution’s policy on sexual harassment.

1. **Social networking and internet security.**

With social networking growing, understand that what you say can still come back to you even if it was said on Facebook or Twitter. Be prudent with the comments you make and pictures you share and use the highest privacy settings. Be careful about saving passwords. Your devices should be password protected to prevent others from accessing patient-related material. A breach of information, even if not intentional, can lead to consequences.

1. **Conflicts of interest.**

Relationships with patients has already been indicated as a conflict of interest for athletic trainers. Other conflicts of interest can arise such as doing what is right for the patient versus what is right for the team, giving into pressure from coaches, or gambling. It is always our duty to do what is best for the patient, regardless of financial gain or notoriety.

1. **Know your representative.**

The District Three representative on the NATA Committed of Professional Ethics is Jatin Ambegaonkar, PhD, ATC, OT. Contact Dr. Ambegaonkar with any questions at [jambegao@gmu.edu](mailto:jambegao@gmu.edu).

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**How to Resolve Ethical Dilemmas**

1. **Know your values and respect them.**

By identifying your values ahead of time, you will be better prepared when an ethical dilemma arises. Also prioritize your values. Do you have integrity? Is integrity more important to you than honesty or accountability? What are the values of the other party’s involved, including the patient? How will these affect your decision?

1. **Refer to your employee contract, state laws, and the NATA Code of Ethics.**

What is legal is not always ethical, and what is ethical is not always legal. Refer to state and federal laws to fully understand the consequences of your decision. Also refer to the NATA Code of Ethics for guidance. Understand that when there is a conflict between the Code and the law, the law prevails.

1. **Consult a mentor.**

Contact a mentor for advice on the dilemma and be honest in divulging all information. You can consult with a lawyer or contact your representative on the NATA Committee of Professional Ethics. The District Three representative is Dr. Jatin Ambegaonkar; [jambegao@gmu.edu](mailto:jambegao@gmu.edu).

1. **Read news articles.**

Perhaps a situation like the one you are in has been experienced before. Search for news articles and fully investigate the procedures and consequences.

1. **Analyzing alternatives and their consequences.**

Decide if there are other alternative actions that can be taken. What are the consequences of each of these actions? Will the player be at further risk of injury? Is a coach concerned that he will lose his position?

1. **Making the decision.**

Who has the responsibility to make the decision? Who has the right to make the decision? Is everyone aware of the consequences? What kind of documentation should be made of the events and discussions that have transpired?

1. **Remember:**

* Avoid conflicts of interest ahead of time. Don’t put yourself in a compromising position.
* Stand up for what is right. Remember that failure to report ethical issues can make you responsible for the violation.
* Over-communicate. Make sure all parties know the pros and cons of each scenario.
* What is ethical and what is legal is not always the same.